

CALL TO DISCIPLESHIP – PART V

by J. Leland Earls

edited by Chris B. Anderson

[The Priorities of Discipleship, Cont.]

Before going into the "Proofs" of Discipleship, I believe I should make a few more remarks on the "Priorities" of Discipleship, which I shared primarily in the last chapter of this study. Therefore, I will focus on certain words of Jesus in Luke 9:23: "If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me." And, I want to emphasize that the path of discipleship is the path of the cross.

What does this mean? What does it mean to "take up our cross daily and follow Jesus?" In principle, I believe that "our cross" must mean the same to us as Jesus' cross meant to Him. The "cross" to Jesus, was simply obedience to the Father's will. What do we read of Jesus in Philippians 2:8? "And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient to the death, even the death of the cross."

We are to "take up our cross DAILY" to DO the Father's will, following the pattern which Jesus set by His own life, regardless of the "cost"—even if it requires SACRIFICE, as it did in Jesus' life. This obedience must flow out of LOVE, even as it did in Jesus' life—not simply out of "duty." But we will get into that more in the next chapter.

[The Joyous Side of Discipleship]

Having said the above, I don't want Satan to deceive you into thinking that this requirement implies a grievous, hard life. As a matter of fact, just the opposite is true—it is the PATH to absolute LIBERTY and complete FULFILLMENT. For these things can be found only IN the WILL of God. God's will is expressed in His commandments, and I John 5:8 says, "For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments: and His commandments are not grievous."

The Greek word translated "grievous" means to be "weighty" or "burdensome." This does not mean there will not be some testings and trials that seem "hard" to us, for Jesus experienced such, in much misunderstanding, rejection, abuse and persecution. But, in spite of all these, He was FILLED with the JOY of doing the Father's will. In Hebrews 1:9 these words are spoken of Jesus: "You have loved righteousness (DOING the Father's will, and KEEPING His commandments), and hated iniquity; therefore God, even Your God, has anointed You with the oil of gladness above Your fellows."

No human being who has walked this earth has ever experienced more JOY and FULFILLMENT than did Jesus!

I remember the testimony of a Christian lady who went through several months of severe depression. It seemed that nothing or no person could bring her out of it. One night she had a very vivid dream. In this dream, she saw Jesus and His disciples walking along the Sea of Galilee. At one point, some of the disciples continued to walk towards the sea, while Jesus and two of the

disciples stopped and sat down under a tree. She then saw one of the disciples lean over and speak something into Jesus' ear. Immediately she saw Jesus break into a smile and even "chuckle" a little. Then, the same disciple leaned over and spoke something else to Jesus. This time she saw Jesus break out into hilarious laughter, "throwing" His head backward with mouth opened in great laughter. Then He leaned forward and backward a number of times while laughing, as one does when one is, in a manner of speaking, "in stitches" with laughter. Suddenly, the woman having the dream awoke, sat up in bed, and started to laugh! Her depression was gone, her joy was returned and she was restored to an "overflowing" fellowship with the Lord from that day on. .

I share this story in discussing the requirements of Discipleship, because one might get the idea that Jesus is some kind of a "killjoy" who wants to take all the pleasure out of life; or some kind of a hard taskmaster who wants to put some kind of a "legal trip" on us. Yes, His requirements are stringent; His path is narrow; in love, He will allow no rivals to "breach" His supreme place in our lives. HE must become our ALL in ALL: that is, IF we are committed to being His disciples." The reason He places these "priorities" on us is because He knows that because of the deficiencies of our "fallen humanity," such is the only way He will be able to DRAW US INTO THE "web" of His all-consuming LOVE—to the extent that we get "stuck" on the complete fulfillment that comes from the "fruit" of this relationship, and long only for a greater "knowing" of Him.

[Ed. Note: Bro. Earls has artfully confronted the morbid spirit of legal critical and bitter oppression that shadows the spirits of dedicated disciples who have

undergone the rigors of suffering and self-sacrifice for the Lord, and which commonly permeates isolated wilderness prophetic groups and individuals.]

[Discipleship: The Only Path to True Life Fulfillment]

The mistake that most Christians make, which tends them to lead a somewhat haphazard, mundane Christian life, is that even though they have accepted Christ as their Savior, and want Him to be a part of their life, they still tend to retain the notion, or I might even say "illusion," that fulfillment in this life for them is going to be found in just the "right" person, the "right" circumstances, at the right kind of personal achievement or material success.

Now, the Lord certainly knows that we have human needs that are a part of our "sojourn" on this earth, and He has designed that those needs be met as we look to Him for guidance, help, and His provision. I cannot here go into further detail, of God's ways in meeting those needs, but I want to emphasize emphatically that never can we find complete and ultimate fulfillment in anything or any person other than the Lord Jesus Christ Himself! This is why it is so important to "pursue" Him as His disciple, place ourselves under His discipline, learn of Him, and seek Him with all of our hearts.

THE PROOFS OR EVIDENCES OF DISCIPLESHIP

[Proof 1: Continuance in His Word]

What are the "proofs" or evidences in our lives that we are truly the disciples of Jesus Christ? Turn with me first to a Scripture that I have already "focused on"—John 8:31-82: "Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed

on Him, if you continue in My word, then are you My disciples indeed; and you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."

Jesus Himself declares that one of the proofs that we are truly His disciples is that we "continue" in HIS WORD. The word "continue" is a translation of the Greek word meno, which means "to stay in a given place, state, relation or expectancy." This word is used many times in the New Testament and is variously translated "abide," "remain," "continue," "dwell," "endure," and "tarry." (Read my booklet on DAILY ABIDING IN CHRIST , for greater understanding.)

[- Students of the Written and Living Word]

There is a two-fold emphasis that I believe is necessary if we are to understand and fulfill what Jesus is saying. First, it is imperative to be "students" of the written Word of God—the Scriptures—and this with the desire and commitment to increasingly know and relate ourselves in a meaningful way to the "living Word"—Jesus Himself, that He, as a "quickening," life giving Spirit (I Cor. 15:45; Eph. 2:1,5; Col. 2:13), and through the instrumentality of the One whom He has sent (Jn. 14:16-18, 26; 15:26; 6:63), even the (Holy) Spirit of Truth, may reveal to us His unfathomable love, His abundant life, His Kingdom ways and principles, His path of discipleship—to the intent that He may inculcate into our very inner being the beauty of His CHARACTER.

Read again the Scripture written at the beginning of this section of our study—John 8:31-32. We cannot claim the promise of verse 32, unless we fulfill the condition of verse 31. We don't experience the freedom-setting

power of truth, unless we are willing to spend time in studying and meditating in the Word of God, to the extent that we not only let the Holy Spirit "illuminate" its truth to us, but also that we so "imbibe" and "absorb" that truth, that it increasingly does a transforming and liberating work in our inner being. Only then, as this "inner reality" begins to be "worked out" in practical ways in our daily experiences and relationships, can we say we "know" the truth that "sets us free" (from the many mental, emotional, and physical bondages of the world, the "flesh" and the devil).

[- The Meaning of "Knowing"]

The word "know" in John 8:32 is a translation from the Greek ginosko, which implies an "inner knowing" by personal experience. There is another Greek word translated "know" many times in the New Testament—eido, which means to "know" in the sense of perceiving something mentally, to be aware of or understand. And there is another Greek word —epiginosko, which means "to know about," or "to know fully," depending on the context.

There is a point that I want to make in contrasting these Greek words, and I believe the best way is to give a simple illustration. Suppose that as a child you were shown an apple so that you would know what it was. But for some reason, you never tasted an apple. As the years followed, every time you saw an apple you perceived or understood that what you were seeing was an apple. That would correspond to the Greek word eido.

But let us continue to suppose that for some reason you never tasted or ate an apple. So you studied extensively and became very knowledgeable in the raising of apples, from the time that the trees are planted to the time that

apples are prepared for market. That would correspond to epiginosko in the Greek.

Yet suppose you still had never tasted an apple. Then the day came when you finally took your first bite of an apple and savored its delicious flavor, and were not satisfied until you had consumed the whole apple. And from that day on you "loved" more and more to eat apples. That would correspond to the Greek word ginosko. From the time that you took your first bite of an apple, you finally came to the place where you "knew" that apple by personal experience. You no longer just had a perception or understanding (eido) of what an apple was when you saw it; neither were you any longer in the realm of knowing all about (epiginosko) apples and how they are grown and marketed.

Beloved, the "heart cry" of a true disciple is to "know" the Lord Jesus in growing intimacy, and His freedom-setting power. He IS TRUTH, but it necessarily follows that HIS WORD is TRUTH (Jn. 14:6; 17:17). Therefore, to "continue" in reading, studying, and meditating in the written Word (the Scriptures) is absolutely necessary if we are to "know" (ginosko) Jesus in intimate love and fellowship.

Here is a practical suggestion that might help you. If we give the Lord a tithe (10% of our material substance), should we not also give Him, in a specific way, 10% of our TIME. In John 11:9, Jesus said: "Are there not twelve hours in the day?"

Using that as our guideline, 10% of 12 hours would be 1 hour and 12 minutes. This hour and twelve minutes should be the minimum amount of

time that we spend separated and ALONE with the Lord in study and meditation in the word of God, coupled with prayer and worship. This amount of time would not have to be spent in one continuous session, but could be divided into separate times, depending upon one's schedule each day. But I believe the "daily time-tithe" needs to be adhered to if we are to be truly disciplined by Jesus Christ.

[- Meditating on the Written and Living Word]

Besides this, there can be times of "meditation" on the truths we have learned during times of the day when our full attention cannot be given to the reading of the WORD. At the same time that we are engaged in certain activities, whether working, driving, etc., our "spirit" can be uplifted toward God, and our "mind" can be "meditating" on truths that we have previously read. To "meditate" means to ponder, muse, to mull over in the mind, to dwell on anything in thought; even to converse with oneself in one's mind. It is during such times of reflective meditation that the Lord gives us insights into His truth, understanding and wisdom, even "keys" to the solution of problems or decisions we are facing.

[- Yields Freedom from Ungodly Counsel]

David had learned the secret of meditating at any time, day or night. In Psalm 1:1-2 he declares: "Blessed is the man that walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scornful. But his delight is in the law of the Lord; and in His law does he meditate day and night." The Psalmist realized that the KEY to knowing the blessing of remaining FREE from falling into the TRAP OF THE "counsel of

the ungodly," the "way of sinners" and the "seat" of those who scorn (in critical scoffing, mocking and deriding), is to continually MEDITATE (keep one's mind occupied with the truths of the Word of God).

[- Yields Freedom from Fantasy Thinking (Romanticism / Nostalgia)]

There are two other major TRAPS from which we can be saved if we will just learn to put into practice the "art" of meditating on the WORD of God. The first is a trap that most Christians fall into. It is the practice of "fantasy thinking" —("day-dreaming" if you want to call it that). The reason for this trap is quite obvious. Most of us find that the real world we live in is not all that we had hoped for, or what we would like it to be. Because of mistakes, unwise past choices, difficult family relationships or unpleasant circumstances (perhaps "accentuated" in the direction of the negative by our own wrong reactions and attitudes), our "real world" is less than desirable, and maybe even difficult. So the temptation (influenced by Satanic-inspired thoughts) to build "images" in the mind and create a "fantasy-world" that is to our liking is easy, and in that "make-believe world" many tend to "live."

Some may think that such "fantasizing" is rather harmless and nothing to be too concerned about. However, this is not true. It is definitely detrimental to our spiritual well-being, because it robs us of what Christ wants to do in "transforming our lives by the renewing of our minds (Rom. 12:2). It also robs Christ of the opportunity to work more actively for us in the real world of our circumstances, because we release Him to do so only as our minds are set on Him and the promises of His Word are coupled with prayer, faith, praise and expectation.

Not only that, but the longer you tend to live in your mind in the fantasy world that you have created, then when you have to face the realities of the real world in which you have to live, you may find yourself not only inadequately prepared (mentally and spiritually), but the tendency will be that you will become easily irritated with important daily tasks and responsibilities. Yes, even the pressures and inevitable problems that will arise as you relate to those around you in the home or in the work-a-day world, will become irritants. Thus, unnecessary conflicts may arise, and almost invariably you find yourself reacting in ways that are not pleasing to the Lord.

Please re-read the preceding words and begin to think of your own life in relationship to the discipline of your time and mind as it relates to studying regularly the Word of God, and then meditating "day and night" (whenever time and conditions permit), so that you may live and function in the real world with faith (founded on God's unalterable Word), confidence, joy, peace and success. Hallelujah! How much better than trying to live in an "image" (idol) world of unreal fantasy.

Discipleship requires that we seek to bring some discipline into our thinking processes. Just as in the physical, we are basically what we eat, so inwardly we are basically what we think (what we "feed on" in our minds). Proverbs 23:7 says, "as a man thinks in his heart, so is he." In the Scriptures, the "heart" is used symbolically to denote our entire inner being with all of its faculties—especially our mental-emotional faculties; for our thoughts are so intertwined with our feelings and emotions. That's why Proverbs 4:23 says, "Keep your heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life." Jesus indicated the same in Matthew 12:35 and 15:18-19. In I Peter 1:18 we read, "Gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace

that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ." The writer is obviously using a symbolic expression. To "gird up the loins of the mind" is an image taken from the way in which the Israelites prepared for any activity with the loose outer robe girded up about the waist with a girdle (waistband), as ready for a journey. Workmen, pilgrims, runners, wrestlers, and warriors (all of whom are types of Christians) in such a manner gird themselves, both to shorten the garments so as not to impede motion, and to gird up the body itself so as to be braced for action.

We can thus see that that was used symbolically of the mind. And, we can understand the admonition to not let our minds casually "hang loose," or to wander aimlessly into every kind of "fantasy thinking," but to be firmly "girded" (bound) to the Word of God, that we might be prepared to face reality, and "go into action" with faith, obedience, confidence, and "overcoming power" by the Holy Spirit. And also to expect and see the Lord go into action on our behalf.

With the metaphor of the armor of a soldier in mind, Paul admonishes us to "Stand therefore, having your loins gird about with truth...." Ephesians 6:14. Jesus not only said, "I am the truth," but also in John 17:17, 19 in His final high priestly prayer to the Father, He declared: "Sanctify them (the disciples) through Your truth; Your word is truth. ...And for their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth." The word "sanctify" means "set apart" or "separated." Truth is REALITY, according to the NATURE and WORKS of God. Our minds must be "set apart" to TRUTH—not the "image-building" fantasy based upon the perversions of this world which often rob and destroy our victory in Christ, and distort and compound in

a great way the relationships and problems that we face in the real world of our daily life.

[- Yields Freedom from Negative Mentality]

Another major TRAP the Lord can save us from, if we will take seriously our being disciplined by the WORD (both through regular study and "practicing" the "art" of meditation), is the "trap" of allowing our mental-emotional faculties to be "poisoned" by dwelling on negative thoughts towards other people whom we do not like for one reason or another, or who have wronged or hurt us, or whom we "perceive" have wronged us.

Many Christians foolishly hold in their minds and hearts "grudges," "resentments," "anger," and even "hateful" thought-feelings. Not only are such thought-emotions contrary to Scripture, and extremely displeasing to the Lord, but those who keep "holding" in their inner being such attitudes, MUST realize that they are only "hurting" (poisoning) themselves, and NOT the ones who are the objects of their wrong attitudes. There is a great KEY which Jesus gave to His disciples for "overcoming" such "poison." It really works, for I can testify to it in my own experience.

[Proof 2: Loving as He Loved]

But before I go into this specific teaching, let me pick up and emphasize that in this portion of our study, I have been dealing with the PROOFS of discipleship—presently with the evidence of "continuing in the WORD" (Jn. 8:31-32). Yet at this point I believe another "proof" needs to be interjected.

In John 13:34-35, Jesus gives the following commandment and evidence: "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this shall all men know that you are My disciples, if you have love one to another." The Greek word for love in this passage is agape, which is the Divine kind of love which is unconditional: it is love expressed simply based on the value of the object loved. It is love that gives with no thought of return. It is love that sacrifices for another, regardless of any kind of feelings which might be involved.

How can we claim to have this kind of love, thus proving that we are truly Jesus' disciples, if we hold any kind of offences, resentments, grudges, bitterness, anger or hate towards any other person. The Divine answer to these kinds of wrong mental-emotional attitudes is FORGIVENESS! Agape love not only demands forgiveness, but it is of the very nature of agape love to forgive. For a Christian, forgiveness is not an option, for Jesus made it clear that if we fail to forgive those who have transgressed against us, neither will God forgive us of our trespasses (Matt. 6:14-15; 18:21-35).

Now consider this carefully: because forgiveness is primarily an act of the will, God can require and command us to forgive, for our will is the faculty that God has given us to make choices—therefore we can choose to obey. Yet here arises a problem. Many sincere Christians, choosing to obey God, exercise their will and forgive any or all who have wronged them, but then they still "struggle" with lingering thoughts and feelings of animosity and hurt towards those they have sincerely forgiven with their will.

Now let me explain the KEY, mentioned earlier, which will always work IF we will sincerely put it into practice. It's a matter of taking seriously the

instruction (as disciples) of our Master-Teacher. Hear His words in Matthew 5:43-45: "You have heard that it was said, You shall love your neighbor, and hate your enemy. But I say to you, love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; that you may be the children (*huios* — "sons") of your Father which is in heaven...."

First, let me call your attention to the fact that I have made note of the incorrect translation of the King James Version, which says "that you may be children of your Father." The Greek word (*teknon*) is not used in this passage. Jesus' instructions in the "Sermon on the Mount" are not to tell us how to become children, but rather to instruct those who are children how to mature into SONSHIP (*huios*). Hebrews 2:10 makes it clear that SONS (*huios*) are to be brought to GLORY (of the Heavenly Kingdom)—not children.

[aside: Prophetic Significance of "Mountain" Position]

I will digress here for a moment to emphasize that ALL of Jesus' ACTIONS, as well as His WORDS, were designed (in the wisdom of the Father) to portray truth. For example, at the very beginning of the "Sermon on the Mount," we read: "And when He saw the multitudes, He went up on the mountain; and after He sat down, His disciples came to Him. And opening His mouth He began to teach them (His disciples)." Symbolically, Jesus was portraying something that was to come to pass in His experience. His leaving the multitudes (of this earth) portrayed the time (after finishing His work) when He would "ascend" into the "mountain" of the Heavenly Kingdom realm. The fact that He "sat down" portrays just what He did when ascended back to the Father. Hebrews 1:8 says that "when He had made purification for sins, He

sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on High." (See also Heb. 8:1;10:12; 12:2; Mark 16:19.) And ever since, through the written Record of the Words He spoke while on earth, and by the power of the Holy Spirit, He has been calling disciples to Himself to TEACH them and discipline them in the ways of "overcoming" victory which will qualify them to "ascend" into the "mountain" of the Heavenly Kingdom to be with Him.

A similar symbolic portrayal is given to us in the Old Testament—(God's "sign" language is consistent throughout Scripture). When God entered into covenant relationship with Israel, He called them to meet Him at Mt. Sinai. But the people were to remain at the foot of the mountain (Ex. 19:16-17). Only Moses was called to go to the top of the mountain (Ex. 24:12). The glory of the Lord dwelt on the mountain top for six days; then Moses was called to enter into the glory on the seventh day (Ex. 24:15-18).

The mountain is symbolic of God's Kingdom. Moses, who went to the top of the mountain and entered into the GLORY, is a type of the many sons (huios) who shall be brought to the glory of the heavenly kingdom (Heb. 2:10), to rule with Christ as "kings" and "priests" (Rev. 1:6; 5:10), for Moses functioned both as a priest and a ruler.

Notice that Moses entered the glory on the 7th day. Since a day is with the Lord as a thousand years (II Pet. 3:8), the six days represent the six thousand years since the fall of man, at the end of which Jesus will return and inaugurate His Kingdom rule (along with the "sons" who will be joined to Him) at the beginning of the seventh one thousand year "day," according to Revelation 20:4.

The covenant people of Israel who remained at the foot of the mountain symbolically represent all saved Christians who will have their lot on the earth within the confines of the earthly Kingdom living in immortal (deathless) physical bodies. Whereas, those "elected" (chosen) for the Heavenly Kingdom will function in glorified bodies, like to Jesus' glorified body (Phil. 3:21).

[return: to Forgiveness]

Now, after this digression, let us return to Matthew 5:43-45. Towards those who, for one reason or another, are at enmity with you (called "enemies"), those who "curse" you (to denounce evil against, and thus to revile, abhor, degrade, or act detestable to you), those who "hate" you, and those who "despitefully use you" (threaten, falsely accuse, insult, slander); and towards whom you are "struggling" with negative or adverse thoughts and feelings (even though you have honestly, as an act of your will, forgiven them), then SINCERELY PUT INTO PRACTICE exactly what Jesus has instructed. Every time you have a wrong thought or feeling towards any one of them, IMMEDIATELY START praying for them, "blessing" them, and loving them (willing God's best for them).

Jesus never commanded us to do something that does not work! I can testify from my own experience that it does. Every time a thought or feeling arises against any who have wronged me, or shown despite towards me, etc., I first reason thusly:

"God loves that person just as much as He does me, He has a good purpose for that person, and I really desire the best for them." And then I

begin to pray for them in harmony with the above thoughts. I also bless them (I begin to pronounce good things upon them and to happen to them), and I "love" (agape) them by declaring to the Lord that I will do anything for them that He instructs or impresses me to do, even if it involves sacrifice for me, for Jesus emphasized we are to "do good" to those that act hateful to us.

If you will honestly practice the above, you will be amazed at how ill feelings and lingering animosities that seem to "plague" you will begin to "melt away" and you will find your whole attitude changing towards those who have hurt or abused you in some way. You will then find that true agape love starts to develop, in that you no longer desire to "settle the score" in some way or seek to retaliate, but you WILL to do them good regardless of what has happened in the past. You will know the reality of Romans 12:14-21, having "overcome evil with good," and progressing on the path of SONSHIP!

Yes, the "proof" of our discipleship is that we "continue" in His WORD (Jn. 8:31 -32), and I have been seeking to show that this means both studying and meditating in that Word. Although it certainly has been implied in what I have written, I want to emphasize that to "continue in His Word" means that we OBEY that Word. When Jesus commissioned His chosen followers to "Go, therefore, and make disciples of all the nations," He also said, "teaching them to OBSERVE (obey) all that I commanded you" (Matt. 28:19-20).

In relating this to the matter of forgiveness (which we have been considering), we see that obedience is a matter of the WILL. Jesus cannot command us to "feel" a certain way. But He will change our feelings (and "heal" our inner "hurts" IF we are willing to DO what He tells us to do). So first, we choose to forgive as an act of OBEDIENCE. And also, if we will

continue to OBEY, by putting into practice in our minds and hearts the principles of Jesus' instructions in Matthew 5:43-45, then inevitably our feelings are going to change, and we will experience "inner healing" and FREEDOM from ill will towards any person. (For more understanding on "inner healing," read my booklet entitled HEALING FOR YOUR BRUISES.)

Let me emphasize again that Jesus' disciples related to Him by two "power-packed" titles. In John 18:18, Jesus says: "You call me TEACHER and LORD, and you are right; for so I am." (NAS version) For those who are dedicated disciples, the two titles are inseparable. What value is there to LEARN from Him as our TEACHER, if we are not willing to OBEY Him as our LORD? In Luke 6:46, Jesus asked His disciples this pertinent question: "And why do you call Me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?"

[aside: Entrance Into the Kingdom]

Amplifying on this, I want to deal with Jesus' words in Matthew 7:21-23. First I will quote just verse 21: "Not every one that says to Me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of Heaven; but he that does the will of My Father which is in heaven." I do not believe that Jesus was here giving the conditions for salvation—which we have already seen is a GIFT to be received (by repentance and faith). There is a present phase or sphere of the Kingdom which is "at work" in the hearts of Christians who seek to let its principles "rule" in their lives. However, when Jesus emphasizes specific teachings that relate to discipleship ("following Him"), or willing and consistent obedience to His LORDSHIP, as conditions for "entering" or "inheriting" His Kingdom, we must understand that He is enunciating conditions for those who aspire to "enter" or "inherit" His coming KINGDOM-GOVERNMENT, as co-rulers or

"kings" and "priests." Since "flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God" (I Cor. 15:50), then we know that those who qualify to enter that Kingdom will function in glorified or "celestial" bodies, in contrast to other Christians who will function in "terrestrial" bodies in the earthly phase of the coming Kingdom (I Cor. 15:40).

It is this coming kingdom and those who will enter or inherit it with Him (having qualified, or been disqualified), which I believe Jesus emphasized in His teaching in Matthew 7:21-23. Jesus gives the requirement in verse 21; then He declares who will be disqualified in verses 22-23: "Many will say to Me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name? And in Your name have cast out devils? and in Your name done many wonderful works (Greek: *dunamis*, meaning 'miracle works of power')? And then will I profess to them I never knew you: depart from Me, you that work iniquity (Greek: 'lawlessness')."

I do not believe that these that Jesus indicates are to be disqualified for HIS (ruling) KINGDOM in "that day," are to be considered as mere imposters or "professing" Christians. Jesus did not contest their claim that they actually had done many good (and even "miraculous") works in HIS NAME! Neither must we automatically assume that the expression, "depart from Me" means that those so addressed are being consigned to the "lost" or dispatched to hell.

Their rejection for intimate fellowship with Him in His (ruling) Kingdom, was based on the fact that they were so busy doing works FOR Jesus, that they had not taken the time to get to know Him. The word "knew" in verse 23 is the Greek word *ginosko*, which we have seen before means to know

personally—through growing personal experience. It is that intimacy and fellowship that Paul so set his heart on (Phil. 3:10), as he "pressed on" toward the mark of the PRIZE of the heavenly Kingdom and glory (Phil. 3:12-14).

When Jesus accuses those rejected as ones who work "iniquity," we must not think of them as "steeped" in the sin of this world. The Greek word means "lawless" in the sense of not being doers of the principles of God's Word—His WILL. They were "doing their own thing"—religiously. Although, I think we can well understand that "worldly" ambitions— seeking the favor and "applause" of men—can easily be an integral part of such religious activity; and thus they are "carnal" Christians instead of spiritual (I Cor. 8:1-3).

[Ed. Comment by Chris B. Anderson: With all due respect to Bro. Earls' intent to distinguish mature disciples from carnal believers relative to kingdom status, his above exposition of kingdom entrance based merely on that distinction is one of his least defensible positions and one with which I firmly disagree. He uncharacteristically confuses the concepts of "entrance" and "inheritance" while ignoring the repeated discourses with Pharisees in which Jesus describes kingdom entrance in context of conversion and repentance with the alternative of entrance into hell (Mt. 5:20; 18:3; 21:31; Mk. 9:47; Jn. 3:5). Bro. Earls' defenses regarding the terms "knowing," "miraculous works," and "lawlessness" are inadequate to defend his position in that the Lord's "knowing" (ginosko) of us is applied to all His sheep (Jn. 10:14-15), Judas performed miraculous works by the Spirit, and Mt. 13:41 teaches that those identified by the fruit of lawlessness/iniquity are cast into a "furnace of fire," not merely restricted to a "lesser" kingdom position.]

[Proof 2 amplified: Forgiving as He Forgave]

Jesus gave another "proof of discipleship, which I have already alluded to, but which needs further comment. In John 13:34-35 we read: "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this shall all men know that you are My disciples, if you have love one to another." Notice that Jesus said they were to love, "as I have loved you." Although these words were spoken close to the end of His ministry, He had not yet died on the cross as His ultimate and supreme demonstration of love. So we must take a look at how He loved them while He was with them in the flesh. The Greek word for "love" here is again the agape kind of love—a selfless, sacrificial giving as an act of the will, simply because of the value of the object loved, with no motive of receiving in return.

[Agape Defined as "Unconditional Commitment"]

Just HOW can we describe the way in which Jesus loved His disciples while He was with them, so that we can know how to love one another as a proof of our discipleship? I have pondered this considerably, and the words that came to me were "unconditional commitment." "Commitment" (a choice of the will—regardless of "feelings" that vary from time to time) is the "glue" that holds any relationship or relationships together.

Jesus chose twelve men and unconditionally committed Himself to them during the time of His earthly ministry, that He might "instill" into them the "essence" of Himself, and by word and example to "imprint" on them the "orientation" of His whole life and ministry—that of doing ONLY the Father's WILL, and seeking to PLEASE Him alone (Jn. 8:28-29). The "unconditional" aspect of His commitment is seen again and again in the Scriptures in what

He had to "put up with" in patient, loving, self-sacrifice because of the shortcomings, tradition-bound obstinacies, unbelief, hardness of heart, selfish ambitions, idiosyncrasies, offensive words and attitudes (and even deserting Jesus in His time of need), in these men He had committed Himself to. I could give Scriptural references for all of the above, but you can find many examples as you read the "gospel" narratives concerning the problems that Jesus had in training these men of destiny.

The point I want to make is that, although He firmly rebuked or corrected them when necessary, He did not take personal offense, hold a grudge, refuse to forgive, reject, "put down" or criticize behind their backs, try to discredit any, did not "break fellowship" with any, heap condemnation, promote "cliques," accuse falsely, spread unfounded rumors or accusations, spread suspicions or try to destroy reputations, etc., etc. ALL of which many Christians are commonly guilty of with regard to other Christians in the Christendom of today. Even after Peter denied Him, Jesus did not say, "I'll certainly never have anything to do with him again," (as would be common among many Christians), but rather He assured Peter of His love, and then restored him with that same love (Mk. 16:7; Jn. 21:15-17).

Now IF one of the conditions of discipleship is that we "love one another" AS Jesus loved His disciples, HOW do we measure up? Based on my experience over many years, the kind of commitment that Jesus had to His disciples is seriously lacking among many, if not most, Christians. I am no one's judge—only God can do that, but I would like to raise the question: "when a misunderstanding, offense, etc., occurs between certain Christians, are they more likely to use that as an occasion to "break fellowship," or to use it as an opportunity to 'build a bridge' to a stronger relationship and continued

fellowship?" Also, "is this a pertinent question as to whether we are truly Jesus' disciples?"